

THE CONCEPTS OF *POLE* AND *MADI*

103

Unlike birth and death, menses do not affect the entire *okka*. 841 They only affect the particular woman, but the important point to note is that she is required to avoid touching other members of the *okka* and abstain from going near the sacred places on the ancestral estate. The safety and well-being of the *okka* will be jeopardized if she does not observe these restrictions.

It was seen that the concepts of ritual purity and impurity are 769 very intimately related to permanent features of the social structure 783 like caste and *okka*, and later on it will be seen that they are also related to the village, but these concepts also occur in certain non-structural contexts. A man, irrespective of the caste to which he belongs, is in a condition of ritual purity while praying or sacrificing to an ancestor or deity. He attains this ritual purity by the performance of a series of ritual actions like taking a bath and wearing ritually pure clothes. He comes into contact with an ancestor or deity when he is praying or making a sacrifice, and such contact requires that he should be in a condition of ritual purity. This principle is carried even into ritual mourning: mourners making an offering of food to the spirit of the departed person are in a condition of extreme ritual purity while they do it, though their general ritual condition till the conclusion of mourning is *like*, an extreme form of pollution.

II

Bodily emissions and waste matter are ritually impure. Sexual 783 intercourse resulting in the production of certain fluids from the 831 bodies of both the partners is prohibited while a person is in a ritually pure condition: the festival-priests at the festival of Kētrappa have to observe continence during the twenty-one days of the biennial festival. In order to ensure that they do observe this rule they are required to sleep in the outer veranda which women do not normally enter.

A person who is in a ritually pure condition may not answer a 517 call of nature. He becomes impure if he does so. Spitte is also 627 ritually impure. This is so all over India, especially among the 515 upper castes. A person may not touch his tongue or teeth with his fingers, and should he do so, he has to wash his hands. Elders come down heavily on a child who puts his finger into his mouth. A person is required specially to avoid putting his finger into his mouth while cooking or serving food.

783 The Koḍagi term for spittle is *tupnir* (*tupparadu* in Tamil means 'to spit'), and it is essential to distinguish between spittle and
 827 objects which have come into contact with spittle directly or indirectly. The Koḍagi term for the latter class of objects is *enji* (Kannāḍa, *enjalū*, Tamil and Malayālam, *echchal*). A man who touches his tongue with a finger defiles his entire hand. This is prohibited normally and especially so while cooking, or serving food, or praying. If he touches a dish of food with a finger which has come into contact with his tongue, he defiles the entire dish. None may eat it.

783 A Coorg folk-tale illustrates extremely well the power of spittle.
 827 Seven deities, six brothers and a sister, set out from Malabar in search of shelter. Three brothers manage, however, to find 'shelter'
 539 in Malabar villages alone. The other three brothers, together with their sister, cross over into Coorg. As soon as they cross the border a struggle for supremacy develops between the brothers and sister. The latter defeats the former in several trials of skill. The brothers then conspire to overthrow the sister. After dinner they all chew betel leaves and areca-nut. One of the brothers takes the chewed stuff out of his mouth and, holding it before the others, says, 'See how red my stuff is!' The others follow suit. The sister's stuff is redder than everybody else's. The brothers then pretend to take the chewed stuff back to their mouths. The sister is taken in and actually puts the stuff into her mouth. The brothers, after making certain that the sister has put her stuff into her mouth, throw their stuff behind their backs. They all exclaim, 'You have eaten *enji*; you have lost your caste'. The unfortunate sister is heartbroken, but the brothers are adamant, and force her to become the deity of Poleyas!

783 Nail and hair parings are impure, and they have to be thrown
 827 far away from the house. Poverty will result if they are scattered in the house.

[305] While a person occasionally pares his finger and toe nails, he does not cut his own hair. This is the barber's job, and the barber's touch defiles a Coorg. The latter takes a bath and changes his clothes after he has been shaved. The place where the barber and his customer sat is purified.

Faeces, urine, semen, menstrual blood, spittle, and parings of nail and hair are all ritually impure.¹ As such they are inconsistent

¹ The natural functions of the body are a great source of pollution, and this idea is at the bottom of the asceticism which is present in Hinduism.

THE CONCEPTS OF *POLE* AND *MADI*

105

with a condition of ritual purity. It is obvious that in the above instances physical dirt has been identified with ritual impurity. Purification consists in taking a bath and wearing pure clothes. Dirt, then, is seen as ritual impurity, and cleanliness as ritual purity. It is necessary, however, to stress that they are ritual and not natural states. 783
827

Birth and death both result in ritual impurity for the entire household for several days. This ritual impurity will not disappear even if the impure person has a dozen baths a day. But, once the prescribed period is over, the individual attains his normal ritual status after a bath. It is necessary to stress that ritual purity is fundamentally different from cleanliness, though they overlap frequently. A simple association of ritual purity with cleanliness, and ritual impurity with dirtiness, would be a neat arrangement, but it would falsify the facts. One comes across ritually pure robes which are very dirty, and snow-white clothes which are ritually impure. 783

A corpse is ritually impure and contact with it results in pollution. The crow, which is a scavenger bird, and is everywhere associated with death, is also impure. The spirits of dead ancestors assume the forms of crows on certain ritual occasions when they are propitiated. The conclusion of funeral rites is marked everywhere by the offer of balls of rice to the dead man's spirit. These balls are kept either on the roof of the house or on the ground at some distance from the house. If the crows fall to these balls soon, it is believed that the dead man is satisfied. Delay in the arrival of the crows indicates that the dead man is dissatisfied. [764]
[769]

If the crows perch on a roof and caw, the death of someone under that roof is presaged. A man who sees two crows mating will die soon after unless he sends a false message announcing his death to his kinsmen. Nowadays it is not unusual for a person who has seen two crows mating to send a telegram announcing his death to his kinsmen.¹ The mating of crows means their increase, and the man who sees it is likely to die. The way he can counteract this is by announcing his death as soon as he has seen the crows mate. The ends of justice are met by such an announcement. [782]
[761]
[784]

If a crow's droppings fall on a person, he or she will have to dip in a tank or river a thousand times. This is extremely inconvenient,

¹ Needless to say, this causes the unfortunate kinsfolk a considerable amount of worry and suffering.